

Interviewing and New Accounts Clerks

(O*NET 53105 and 55332)

Nature of the Work

Interviewing and new accounts clerks obtain information from individuals and business representatives who are opening bank accounts, gaining admission to medical facilities, participating in consumer surveys, and completing various other forms. By mail, telephone, or in person, these workers solicit and verify information, create files, and perform a number of other related tasks.

The specific duties and job titles of interviewing and new accounts clerks depend upon the type of employer. In doctors' offices and other health care facilities, for example, *interviewing clerks* are also known as *admitting interviewers* or *patient representatives*. These workers obtain all preliminary information required for admission, such as the patient's name, address, age, medical history, present medications, previous hospitalizations, religion, persons to notify in case of emergency, attending physician, and the party responsible for payment. In some cases, interviewing clerks may be required to verify benefits with the person's insurance provider or work out financing options for those who might need it.

Other duties of interviewers in health care include assigning patients to rooms and summoning escorts to take patients to their rooms; sometimes these workers may escort patients themselves. Using the facility's computer system, they schedule lab work, x-rays, and surgeries and prepare admitting and discharge records and route them to appropriate departments. They may also bill patients, receive payments, and answer the telephone. In an outpatient or office setting, they also schedule appointments, keep track of cancellations, and provide general information about care. In addition, the role of the admissions staff, particularly in hospitals, is expanding to include a wide range of patient services from assisting patients with financial and medical questions to helping family members find hotel rooms.

Interviewing clerks who conduct market research surveys and polls for research firms have somewhat different responsibilities. These interviewers ask a series of prepared questions, record the responses, and forward the results to management. They may ask individuals questions about their occupation and earnings, political preferences, buying habits, or customer satisfaction. Although most interviews are conducted over the telephone, some are conducted in focus groups or by randomly polling people at a shopping mall. More recently, the Internet is being used to elicit people's opinions. Almost all interviewers use computers or similar devices to enter the responses to questions.

New accounts clerks, more commonly referred to as *customer service representatives*, handle a wide variety of operations in banks, credit unions, and other financial institutions. Their principal tasks are to handle customer inquiries, explain the institution's products and services to people, and refer customers to the appropriate sales personnel. If a person wants to open a checking or savings account, or an IRA, the customer service representative will interview the customer and enter the required information into a computer for processing. They will also assist people in applying for other services, such as ATM cards, direct deposit, and certificates of deposit. Some customer service representatives also sell traveler's checks, handle savings bonds, perform foreign currency transactions, and perform teller duties, as required. Although the majority of customer service representatives work in branch offices and deal directly with customers, a growing number are being hired by banks to work in central call centers, taking questions from customers 24 hours a day, entering appropriate information into customer records, and, if necessary, referring customers to other specialists in the financial institution.

Employment

Interviewing and new accounts clerks held about 239,000 jobs in 1998. More than half were employed by commercial banks and other depository institutions. The remainder worked mostly in hospitals and other



Jobs should be plentiful for medical facility admitting clerks.

health care facilities and for research and testing firms. Around 3 out of every 10 clerks worked part time.

Job Outlook

Overall employment of interviewing and new accounts clerks is expected to increase about as fast as the average for all occupations through 2008. Much of this growth will stem from an increase in part-time and temporary jobs. In addition to growth, a larger number of job openings is expected to arise from the need to replace the thousands of interviewing and new accounts clerks who leave the occupation or the work force each year. Job prospects to fill these openings will be best for applicants with a broad range of job skills, such as the good customer service, math, and telephone skills.

The number of interviewing clerks is projected to grow faster than average, reflecting growth in the health services industry. This industry will hire more admissions interviewers as health care facilities consolidate staff and expand the role of the admissions staff, and as an aging and growing population requires more visits to health care practitioners. In addition, increasing use of market research will create more jobs for interviewers to collect data. In the future, though, more market research is expected to be conducted over the Internet, thus reducing the need for telephone interviewers to make individual calls.

Employment of new accounts clerks, on the other hand, is expected to grow only as fast as average as bank employment slows and more services are provided electronically. However, these changes will favor employment of new accounts clerks over other workers in banks, particularly tellers, because of their ability to provide a wide range of services. Also, new accounts clerks will be hired in increasing numbers by banks to handle customer inquiries at their call centers.

Sources of Additional Information

Information on working conditions, training requirements, and earnings appears in the *Information clerks* introduction to this section.

State employment service offices can provide information about employment opportunities.

Receptionists

(O*NET 55305)

Nature of the Work

Receptionists are charged with a responsibility that may have a lasting impact on the success of an organization—making a good first impression. These workers are often the first representatives of an organization a visitor encounters, so they need to be courteous, professional,

and helpful. Receptionists answer telephones, route calls, greet visitors, respond to inquiries from the public and provide information about the organization. In addition, receptionists contribute to the security of an organization by helping to monitor the access of visitors.

Whereas some tasks are common to most receptionists, the specific responsibilities of receptionists vary depending upon the type of establishment in which they work. For example, receptionists in hospitals and doctors' offices may gather personal and financial information and direct patients to the proper waiting rooms. In beauty or hair salons, however, they arrange appointments, direct customers to the hairstylist, and may serve as cashier. In factories, large corporations, and government offices, they may provide identification cards and arrange for escorts to take visitors to the proper office. Those working for bus and train companies respond to inquiries about departures, arrivals, stops, and other related matters.

Increasingly, receptionists use multiline telephone systems, personal computers, and fax machines. Despite the widespread use of automated answering systems or voice mail, many receptionists still take messages and inform other employees of visitors' arrivals or cancellation of an appointment. When they are not busy with callers, most receptionists are expected to perform a variety of office duties including opening and sorting mail, collecting and distributing parcels, making fax transmittals and deliveries, updating appointment calendars, preparing travel vouchers, and performing basic bookkeeping, word processing, and filing.



Receptionists answer telephones, route calls, greet visitors, and respond to inquiries from the public.

Employment

Receptionists held about 1.3 million jobs in 1998, accounting for over two-thirds of all information clerk jobs. More than two-thirds of all receptionists worked in services industries, and almost half of these were employed in the health services industry in doctors' and dentists' offices, hospitals, nursing homes, urgent care centers, surgical centers, and clinics. Manufacturing, wholesale and retail trade, government, and real estate industries also employed large numbers of receptionists. About 3 of every 10 receptionists worked part time.

Job Outlook

Employment of receptionists is expected to grow faster than the average for all occupations through 2008. This increase will result from rapid growth in services industries—including physician's offices, law firms, temporary help agencies, and consulting firms—where most receptionists are employed. In addition, high turnover in this large occupation will create numerous openings as receptionists transfer to other occupations or leave the labor force altogether. Opportunities should be best for persons with a wide range of clerical skills and experience.

Technology should have conflicting effects on the demand for receptionists. The increasing use of voice mail and other telephone automation reduces the need for receptionists by allowing one receptionist to perform work that formerly required several receptionists. However, increasing use of technology also has caused a consolidation of clerical responsibilities and growing demand for workers with diverse clerical skills. Because receptionists may perform a wide variety of clerical tasks, they should continue to be in demand. Further, receptionists perform many tasks that are of an interpersonal nature and are not easily automated, ensuring continued demand for their services in a variety of establishments. Receptionists tend to be less subject to layoffs during recessions than other clerical workers because establishments need someone to perform their duties even during economic downturns.

Sources of Additional Information

Information on working conditions, training requirements, and earnings appears in the *Information Clerks* introduction to this section. State employment offices can provide information on job openings for receptionists.

Reservation and Transportation Ticket Agents and Travel Clerks

(O*NET 53802 and 53805)

Nature of the Work

Each year, millions of Americans travel by plane, train, ship, bus, and automobile. Many of these travelers rely on the services of reservation and transportation ticket agents and travel clerks. These ticket agents and clerks perform functions as varied as selling tickets, confirming reservations, checking baggage, and providing tourists with useful travel information.

Most *reservation agents* work for large hotel chains or airlines, helping people plan trips and make reservations. They usually work in large reservation centers answering telephone inquiries and offering suggestions on travel arrangements, such as routes, time schedules, rates, and types of accommodation. Reservation agents quote fares and room rates, provide travel information, and make and confirm transportation and hotel reservations. Most agents use proprietary networks to quickly obtain information needed to make, change, or cancel reservations for customers.

Transportation ticket agents are sometimes known as passenger service agents, passenger-booking clerks, reservation clerks, airport service agents, ticket clerks, or ticket sellers. They work in airports, train, and bus stations selling tickets, assigning seats to passengers, and checking baggage. In addition, they may answer inquiries and give directions,